

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

6 April 2012

that a single group can so crudely undermine the Greek economy at such a difficult time” and called on the “union’s leadership” to “show the necessary maturity and responsibility.”

Autoworkers strike at Russian plant

Autoworkers employed at the Benteler plant in the city of Kaluga, south of Moscow, took strike action last week to demand an increase in pay and a new collective contract. The factory processes components for the car industry, including a neighbouring Volkswagen plant.

The strike began on March 29 and ended April 1 after management agreed to meet workers’ demands, according to the RIA Novosti web site. The workers are only paid a rate averaging 18,000 rubles (\$600) a month at present.

In early March the workers began a work-to-rule action, after which management agreed to discuss their grievances with the Interregional Trade Union of Autoworkers (ITUA).

The strike began after workers threatened to stop products being moved out of the factory.

The International Metalworkers’ Federation to which the ITUA is affiliated reported, “Upon announcement of the strike, workers were forced by security guards out of the shops, but they managed to stay in the cafeteria. The plant was surrounded by riot police and security forces from both Benteler and nearby Volkswagen plant. However, workers from VW, also organized by the ITUA, as well as social and union activists from Kaluga went to the factory gates to support striking workers.”

Greek seamen’s union calls strike after demobilising previous action

The Panhellenic Seamen’s Federation of Greece has called a 48-hour strike for April 10-11 after suspending strike action by seamen two weeks ago. The workers originally struck in opposition to pension cuts and changes to collective labour contracts.

The government of Prime Minister Lucas Papademos plans to move the seamen’s social insurance scheme, NAT, into a new scheme, EOPPY. Under new legislation, NAT pensioners have already had their pensions slashed by up to €500-€600 per month.

Following verbal promises made by Development, Competitiveness and Shipping Minister Anna Diamantopoulou, the strike was suspended on March 20. According to government sources the strike was beginning to have major repercussions as it was called off.

The media are seeking to present the seamen as a group holding the country to ransom. *Kathemerini* commented this week, “it is unthinkable

Cement workers at plant in Ireland strike

Workers employed at Irish Cement Ltd in Platin, Ireland began strike action on Tuesday in a dispute over unpaid wages. More than 100 workers are employed at two production plants affected by the strike.

The SIPTU trade union, the TEEU and Unite are involved in the strike as part of the Irish Cement Group of Unions. They claim the company has not honoured a Labour Court recommendation to pay the workers. The firm is seeking to impose a pay cut of between 15 percent and 18 percent and has said this must be carried out before it pays back the owed money.

The Secretary of the Irish Cement Group of Unions, Karan O’loughlin, said, “Earlier this year the Labour Court made a recommendation that the company must pay monies which are outstanding to its employees which amount to between €5,500 to €9,500 per worker”.

Unite trade union to ballot bus drivers in London

The Unite trade union in Britain is to ballot 24,000 of its members, employed by 15 separate bus operators in London. The drivers are in dispute with their companies over their payments during the upcoming Olympic Games.

During the games the drivers’ workload will increase sharply, with the union saying the equivalent of more than 9,000 double-decker busloads of extra passengers will arrive in London for the event.

Unite is calling for each worker to be granted a payment of £500 as compensation.

Unite regional secretary Peter Kavanagh said, “Every other transport worker in London is getting a payment, with the exception of the bus workers. London bus operators are doing passengers and their workers a huge disservice by refusing to engage with the union. It is a massive error of judgment.”

Pilots strike at Cyprus Airways

Pilots at Cyprus Airways (CY) held a four- hour stoppage Wednesday in opposition to a 9 percent cut in their pay. The action was held between

8.30 a.m. until 12.30 p.m. and affected four flights to and from London and Paris.

The cut had initially been agreed by the pilots union last year but the company also wants all employees to have the same pay cut in 2012. CY cited the increased cost of fuel and the fact that “competition has become very severe and we are facing many problems in that department as well”.

Following the strike the pilots union, PASYPI said it would take legal action “against the members of the CY administration who had decided or approved cutting our salaries”. It added, “The general assembly unanimously condemns this unacceptable tactic, which is not an isolated phenomenon but is a part of a series of violations of signed agreements”.

According to the *Cyprus Mail* a general assembly of the striking staff, “authorised the union’s board to continue, and escalate measures, without ruling out strikes if and when necessary”.

The company is also planning to carry out more than 100 redundancies. The Labour Minister Sotiroulla Charalambous said she had tabled a proposal regarding the plans this week but that the pilots union had yet to accept it.

The *Mail* reported that the pilots union “had said that they wanted to see a viable business plan and details regarding redundancies—not just a vague mention”. They had also “asked for offsetting measures, like company stock, in return for their concessions”, the newspaper said.

Construction workers strike at Polish football stadium

On Wednesday construction workers at Wroclaw stadium in western Poland took strike action to demand unpaid wages. The strike comes just two months before the stadium is set to be used as one of the host venues for the Euro 2012 football tournament.

The strikers were involved in mounting an electrical system at the stadium, which is set to be approved by European football’s governing body, UEFA, on May 11.

The workers are employed by two firms, Zbart and ANP Rybak. They are demanding that the overdue wages be paid by chief subcontractor Imrech. The *Polskie Radio* web site reported, that, “The workers say some 3 million zloty (720,000 euro) have yet to be paid to all the subcontractors involved.”

Teachers strike at 60 schools in Nottingham, England

Teachers at around 60 schools across the city of Nottingham in the East Midlands, England struck on March 29 in opposition to the local authority’s plans to change term arrangements, which will disrupt them and school children and result in a shorter summer holiday. The action was called by the National Union of Teachers.

Nottingham City Council is seeking to move from a three term year to one of five terms. If the teachers do not accept the changes, under the Section 188 notice they have been issued with, they face the sack.

Despite the imminent threat to their jobs, the trade unions at the schools have not called any joint action. Whilst the NUT members took action, the ATL union has only said it will hold a strike ballot. The NASUWT union has said it will hold an “indicative ballot”.

Whilst the NUT has authorised a local strike, it is fresh from calling off a national strike by its members against the government attacks on their pensions.

Electricity workers in Jordan begin indefinite strike

Workers at the Central Electricity Generating Company (CEGCO) in Jordan began an indefinite strike Tuesday in pursuit of better pay and benefits. The firm is the largest power generator in the country and runs seven power generation plants nationwide.

The Electricity Workers Union (EWU) said it had previously agreed a deal with CEGCO, in which the firm would increase pay and benefits.

The EWU president Ali Hadid told the *Jordan Times*, “Before going on strike, we accepted this amount because we did not want to go on strike. Now, we have new demands”.

The company said, “We offered to distribute half the money this year and give the employees the second half next year in accordance with the new system, but the union refused”, he stressed. Management is seeking to tie any new pay deal to productivity increases.

Whilst authorising a strike, the union has organised it on the most limited basis, with the main aim of keeping CEGCO from being shut down.

Hadid told the *Jordan Times* that only day shift workers were involved in the strike and that night shift workers would be working all day to ensure no power outages.

He said, “The night shift can handle the whole job because it consists of 35 employees and the group can handle the pressure of the work”.

Bus drivers end strike in Egypt

On March 27 some 1,500 Egyptian bus drivers at 27 garages ended their 10-day strike after reaching agreement with government representatives, including Minister of Transportation Galal El-Said. The dispute originated when hundreds of bus drivers struck in the Suez Canal cities on 23 February. As the action gathered strength the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, the ruling military regime, operated 50 of its buses in an attempt to break the strike.

An article in *Al-Ahram* stated that with the agreement, “the bonus for end-of-service was increased to two months for each year in service, whereas workers who have been working for 36 years will receive 72 months worth of bonuses. The rest of their demands are to be implemented after deducting the LE230 million in the form of bonuses, incentives and raises which they took starting from September last year.”

It added, “Striking bus drivers of the Public Transportation Authority (PTA) have been demanding higher wages; to be affiliated to the Ministry of Transportation instead of the Holding Company for Transportation (HCT) which is affiliated to the Cairo governorate; independent trade unions; good quality of spare parts for buses; and proper maintenance of the vehicles. This is in addition to the dismissal of what the drivers said were corrupt officials working for the company and increasing end-of-service bonuses to 100 months of the basic salary.”

The article reported that the PTA had lost more than LE1 million a day during the stoppage.

Al-Ahram cited one driver who said that the officials on the PTA board, “all belong to the former regime. They do not want to meet our needs, they do not represent us, they should be chosen among us, and they are nothing but corrupt officials who repeatedly prevent attempts to merge with the ministry in order to steal our money.” He concluded, “We will strike again if the government breaks its promises.”

Ghanaian call centre workers begin strike

Around 350 call centre workers, working for the Vodafone Call Centre based in Accra began an indefinite strike Monday. Vodafone outsourced the call centre to the South African company Teletec in 2010. The workers are protesting against bad conditions and at receiving no pay increments since the takeover by Teletec.

A spokesman for the workers told the Ghana news web site Myjoyonline.com that operators at the call centre were paid much less than workers in others, with graduate level workers being paid GHS370 (\$207) a month whereas other companies pay GHS600 (\$337).

The workers say they will continue their strike until the company agrees to discussions with the worker's union.

(\$2175).

The company refused to address the pay differential issue and has now withdrawn its offer and says it will not enter further negotiations and that the miners could return to work under their existing conditions.



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wsws.org/contact

Malawian civil servants issue strike ultimatum

On Monday civil servants represented by the Civil Servants Trade Union (CSTU), gave seven days' notice of strike action. They are demanding pay increases in line with the escalating rise in the cost of living. There has been a sharp increase in the basic staples of life, a package of sugar which had recently cost K210 (\$1.25) can now cost as much as K500 (\$3) and cooking oil which had sold at K500 (\$3) a litre now costs K1800 (\$11).

The workers issued their ultimatum after talks between the government and CSTU officials. The government told the union that any pay increase would have to wait until after the government set its budget in July.

The workers are also protesting the wide gap between the pay of senior civil servants and that of most civil servants, the lowest grade of civil servants earn around K15,000 (\$90) a month.

Zimbabwe: Municipal workers suspended after strike

Around 50 municipal workers employed by the city of Mutare, went on strike last week in protest of non-payment of \$500,000 in unpaid bonuses and other benefits. The workers are members of the Zimbabwe Urban Council Workers Union (ZUCWU). Mutare lies on the eastern edge of the country and is its fourth largest city.

The city council responded by declaring the strike illegal, saying the workers provided an essential service and had issued no notice of the action. Twenty three workers were suspended and will face disciplinary charges, in the meantime they will not be paid or receive any benefits due.

South African platinum miners' strike continues

The strike by around 3,500 platinum miners at the Modikwa platinum mine has now lasted three weeks. Their original demands included a 12 percent pay increase and drill allowances.

The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), representing the miners, met with Modikwa management on Tuesday. Management had made a final offer of a 10 percent pay increase, which the NUM was prepared to accept but wanted the company to address the gap between the lowest paid workers on R3,000 (\$385) a month and the highest paid on R17,000